R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 019 171 24 RC 002 340

THE EFFECT OF RURALITY ON THE EDUCATION OF RURAL YOUTH.

BY- CHARLES, EDGAR B.
NEW MEXICO STATE UNIV., UNIVERSITY PARK

REPORT NUMBER BR-6-2469 PUB DATE JUN 68
CONTRACT OEC-4-6-062469-1574
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.40 8P.

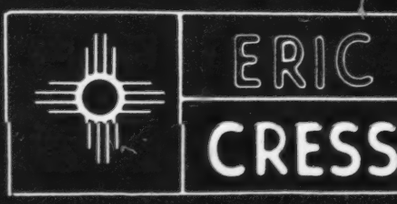
DESCRIPTORS- COMMUNITY BENEFITS, CULTURALLY ADVANTAGED, COURSES, DISADVANTAGED ENVIRONMENT, FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS, FAMILY SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP, GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION, MANPOWER UTILIZATION, OCCUPATIONAL GUIDANCE, POPULATION TRENDS, RURAL ENVIRONMENT, *RURAL YOUTH, *RURAL EDUCATION, *RURAL SCHOOLS, *RURAL URBAN DIFFERENCES, SMALL SCHOOLS, *SURVEYS, TEACHERS, UNEMPLOYMENT, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL COUNSELING,

THE PHENONMENON OF RURALITY OCCURS ALONG A RURAL-URBAN CONTINUUM, WITH THE DEGREE OF RURALITY DEPENDING UPON ENVIRONMENTAL, OCCUPATIONAL, AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS. A HIGH DEGREE OF RURALITY IS LIKELY TO EXIST IN AREAS WHERE POPULATION CENTERS DO NOT EXCEED 2,500 PERSONS, OCCUPATIONS ARE PRIMARILY BASED ON NATURAL RESOURCE AND/OR LAND UTILIZATION, AND SCHOOLS CHARACTERISTICALLY HAVE SMALL ENROLLMENTS, COURSES LIMITED TO ACADEMIC OFFERINGS, AND LITTLE CHANCE FOR EXPANSION OR CONSOLIDATION. THE POPULARLY-HELD CONTENTION THAT RURALITY IS EDUCATIONALLY UNDESIRABLE WAS NOT BORNE OUT IN A RECENT SURVEY OF 1,500 RURAL TEACHERS WHICH INDICATED THAT MANY TEACHERS WERE IN AGREEMENT ON THE ADVANTAGES OF RURALITY, BUT WERE IN FAR LESS AGREEMENT ABOUT THE DISADVANTAGES, IF ANY. ALTHOUGH SUCH ADVANTAGES AS CLOSELY-KNIT FAMILY UNITS, HEALTHY PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS, GREAT AMOUNTS OF TEACHER-STUDENT-HOME INTERACTION, AND LIGHTER TEACHER WORK LOADS PAINT A ROSY PICTURE. A MAJOR EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE IS THAT RURAL YOUTH DO NOT REALIZE FARM MECHANIZATION IS STEADILY REDUCING THE AVAILABILITY OF UNSKILLED FARM-RELATED JOBS. THIS REALIZATION IS NOT ACHIEVED UNTIL THE UNTRAINED YOUTH MEET THE FRUSTRATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT. THIS SINGLE MAJOR EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE OF RURALITY CAN BE OVERCOME BY BROADER TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL OFFERINGS, ADEQUATE COUNSELING SERVICES, AND BETTER PREPARED TEACHERS. (DK)

ED019171

STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL POSITION OR POLICY.

THE EFFECT OF RURALITY ON THE EDUCATION OF RURAL YOUTH



The

Clearinghouse on

Rural

Education and

Small

Schools

New Mexico State University

Las Cruces

RC002340

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

THE EFFECT OF RURALITY ON THE EDUCATION OF RURAL YOUTH

by
Edgar B. Charles
Assistant Director, CRESS

June 1968

Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
New Mexico State University
Box 3AP, University Park Branch
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88001

A Unit of the Educational Resources Information Center
of the Bureau of Research. U.S.O.E.

In writing of the effects of rurality on the education of rural youth, it must be noted that the term rurality, though widely and popularly verbalized today, is actually a rather complex term which not only refers to a specific type of environment but also has occupational and socio-cultural connotations. As suggested by such authorities as Willits and Bealer (6) and Larson and Rogers (4), the notion of rurality should probably be thought of as being on a rural-urban continuum, in which the degree of rurality then becomes important. This degree of rurality may be visualized by considering the continuum to be made up of at least two other continua (6). The first would include the *number* of the connotations which the subject possessed, while the second would include the *amount* of each possessed. The total *degree* of rurality would then be determined by the relationship between the two components.

The actual complexity, then, of rurality should be remembered as this paper is read, and it is to be hoped that it will suggest studies to the alert reader which might be made to determine the educational effects of specific environmental, occupational, and socio-cultural variables under varying degrees of rurality. However, the primary purpose of the paper is not to suggest sources of research, but rather is simply to make an examination of the effects that a high degree of rurality may have on the education of those youth growing up under such conditions.

For the purpose of this paper, a high degree of rurality will be considered to exist in areas where the population is found extensively in centers of 2500 people or less; where the inhabitants make their living primarily from such activities as farming, cattle raising, dairying, mining, forestry occupations, fishing, oil production, railroading, tourism, or government installations; where the cultural and educational opportunities are limited; and where the schools have small enrollments (averaging no more than 75 students per grade in the high school), are limited primarily to academic offerings, and have little chance for expansion or consolidation because of geographic reasons or a financial inability.

A popular conception of people living in such areas, a conception more often than not promoted by authorities who have never lived there, is that they are bumbling, awkward hayseeds, disadvantaged in every phase of life, and inferior in every area to their urban counterparts; even worse, their schools are automatically condemned as being poor, and today efforts are being made in some areas to close these schools en masse and crowd the students into large consolidated schools. Whether any of these opinions are truly valid is certainly an area which needs more study.

While life in rurality may have some disadvantages, such blanket condemnations are completely unjust. For example, under rural conditions, the youth is completely surrounded by nature. He plays and works out of doors in open spaces which are not restricted by bleak walls or endangered by heavy traffic. He has far fewer physical restrictions than his urban peers, who have limited activities, and thus tends to grow up

in a healthier physical environment. His leisure time activities are more healthful, both physically and emotionally, as he participates in 4H programs and similarly guided experiences, and what he may lack in sophistication, he often surpasses by becoming a good, solid American citizen.

Further, the rural youth learns early to view life from the point of view of a producer rather than a consumer. In many instances he may even become a small producer himself, although concentrated participation in such activities may produce the responsibilities of too many chores and responsibilities at too early an age. On the other hand, judicious use of this advantage can produce young people who have a sense of self-discipline, a knowledge of the advantage of cooperation, and a respect for both physical and mental work. They often are able to see their family group at work, rather than having to see one or both parents leave each day for some vague and unidentifiable thing called "work". This produces a much closer family relationship, a far freer emotional atmosphere, and an opportunity for the youth to identify more readily with their work (5).

As to the condemnation of the quality of rural schools, it is quite possible that many of those who declare that the small rural school is automatically bad are people who are trying to make a point already predetermined in their minds. Not everyone believes that the effect of the small rural school is bad; in fact, many experienced rural educators feel that rurality has many good educational effects. Some of these opinions were expressed as direct quotations by rural superintendents, in an April, 1968, report by Mrs. Margery Burns, of Milan, Minnesota, to the Minnesota State Legislative Commission on Education (1). Among these quotations are the following:

(1) Children must be convinced that they have worth, value, and dignity as individuals, which can best be done where they are known as individuals by the faculty and their peers alike. Every child needs to succeed in something. He can do this where his opportunities to participate are greatest-in the small school.

(2) Disciplinary problems are greater in proportion and in type in a large school. All arguments to the contrary, rural students definitely are slighted in a large school, if for no other reason than the fact that they must spend so much time in travel.

(3) One of the facets of this which impresses me the most is the fact that during my tenure as administrator in this school, we have had 155 graduates, which is only 22 per year, but of these, not one has become a burden to society. Each of them is a contributing member, not on welfare, relief, or as a recipient of some other form of charity. This is, of course, the ultimate goal of education, that each individual becomes a useful, contributing member of our society.

(4) Rural boys and girls will lose out on practically all activities in larger schools. Our Kings and Queens (i.e. of school organizations) would never have that

satisfying experience. It is a thrill to be a King and Queen, even a King and Queen over a small group.

(5) I find that students who are shy, those who are a little obese, and those who do not meet the present day standards of being beautiful or goodlooking find their place in activities, in many cases become leaders, in a small school. I marvel many times at the relatively shy person who blossoms out in the small school.

These are the opinions of experienced rural educators, men who are in a position to make an over-all estimate of the effects of rurality on the student in the small rural school.

The criticism might be raised that, as superintendents, these men have a biased and unrealistic opinion of exactly what the school itself might be like. But this is not true. A recent, and still to be published, study by the author of this paper investigated, among other things, the advantages and disadvantages of small rural schools, as perceived by both experienced and inexperienced, elementary and secondary teachers, with backgrounds ranging from small farms to cities of over 25,000 population (2). The teachers surveyed, over 1500 in number, were to be found in 10 predominantly rural states, extending from Maine in the east to Arkansas in the south to Montana in the west.

Over 50 per cent of the teachers taking part in the study believed that among the effects of rurality were the following advantages, both for children and teachers:

1). The teacher is closer to each student, knows more of the child's home life and particular needs, and gets to know the parents of the children he teaches.
2). The youngsters have more self-discipline and are more inclined to self-help than other students, they are more ready to work ahead on their own initiative, and they are more appreciative of the teacher's help than most students in large schools.
3). The small rural school has fewer discipline problems, less delinquency, better cooperation from students, and better student-teacher relationships.
4). The children in the small rural school receive far more individualized attention than those in a large school.
5). The child in the small rural school has more opportunities to be occupied-in and out of school, he has more chance to participate in extra-curricular activities, and he has more outdoor interests available to him.
6). Generally the rural children have more concern for each other, learn more from each other, are less shy, have more similarity in their backgrounds, are from a very stable home life, and are more eager to attend school than their counterparts in the large urban school.
7). In the small rural school the teacher feels more responsibility for teaching *each* child as much as possible.

8). There is generally a freedom from administrative pettiness and harassment, freedom from school politics, fewer bosses, good faculty communications, and a closer knit faculty.
9). It is a quiet, stable life; it is more relaxed, with fewer social or professional pressures; there is more freedom and a happy atmosphere; there are less duties outside school hours; and there is a unity among rural people that is seldom found among urban people.
10). The teacher can become more involved in community activities, and is usually looked up to and highly respected by other community members.
11). In the small rural school it is easier to implement educational innovations and to experiment with your own ideas; the teacher has an opportunity to develop a broad background in school organization and administration; there is more use for all facets of teaching; the teacher becomes more versatile by having the opportunity to teach in more areas.
12). There is a closer association with the parents, who participate in many more school and community activities than do the parents of urban children.
13). The classes are much smaller, which provides a lighter work load for the teachers.
14). It is easier to vary the curriculum to benefit the students.

When these same teachers were surveyed about the disadvantageous effects of rurality, there was far less agreement among them. In fact there was no one area where as many as 50 per cent of the teachers were in agreement. However, those areas in which the most agreement occurred included:

1). There are no disadvantages at all.
2). The rural community is often too isolated to provide an adequate social life for the teacher; there are few cultural opportunites available to either teacher or student.
3). There is a lack of equipment and modern facilities to work with, though if the administrator is alert he can obtain almost anything today with Federal aid.
4). The communities sometimes tend to be highly provincial in their outlook, may be ignorant of the real value of education, are often far too concerned with the personal affairs of the school personnel, and sometimes tend to try to dominate the schools.
5). The communities and their school boards are often not capable of understanding professional persons; they seldom realize the necessity of either hiring specially trained people such as guidance counsellors or providing in-service training in such specialized areas; they often do not realize that in addition to college preparation, opportunity should be provided for vocational courses.

While this paints a rather rosy overall picture of the effects of rurality, there is one other aspect to the problem, which has not been considered. This concerns the rural youth who is unaware of the fact that he will probably be destined for a non-farm

job because of industrialization and mechanization on the farm today. According to Haller, Burchinal, and Taves (3), this youngster, because he is not preparing for college and because he does not believe an education is necessary for farming, will drop out of school early, make poor grades in high school, and acquire little knowledge of the non-farm world of work. When such youngsters find that there is no work for them on the farm, large numbers of the group, who are not really prepared to compete in the urban society, leave their homes to find success in the city, but because of their poor preparation all they usually find is frustration and a place on the welfare and unemployment rolls.

If the rural high school is to serve this non-college prone group successfully, it must provide adequate counseling to these youngsters and it must provide opportunities for education and training in vocational, technical, and occupational areas, in addition to those opportunities currently provided for the other youth. That this is obvious to contemporary educators can be seen from the previously stated disadvantages discerned by these people. The problem now is to convince the local school board that currently this is probably the only major bad effect of rurality on the education of rural youth. By spending more money on broader programs and by demanding, then hiring, more widely prepared teachers, much of this difficulty can also be overcome.

It would seem that the effects of a high degree of rurality on rural education might have far more benefits than many people have attributed to it in recent years

REFERENCES

1. BURNS, Margery, *Report to jthe State Legislative Commission on Education.* St. Paul, Minnesota, April 1968, pp 2-3.

2. CHARLES, Edgar B., *The Preparation of Teachers for Small Rural Schools.* – Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona, unpublished Doctoral dissertation, 1968.

3. HALLER, Archibald O., Lee G. BURCHINAL, and Marvin J. TAVES, *Rural Youth Need Help in Choosing Occupations.* East Lansing, Michigan: Agricultural Experiment Station, Department of Sociology and Authropology, Michigan State University, Circular Bulletin 235, 1963.

4. LARSON, Olaf F. and Everett M. ROGERS, "Rural Youth in Transition: The American Setting," in James H. Copp (Ed.), *Our Changing Rural Society.* Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1964, pp 39-67.

5. SKARD, Ase Grude, *What Happens to Children in the Transition from a Predominantly Rural Economy to Modern Industrialization?* Washington, D.C.: Department of Rural Education, National Education Association.

6. WILLITS, Fern K. and Robert C. BEALER, "An Evaluation of a Composite Definition of Rurality." *Rural Sociology,* 32:2, June 1967, pp 165-177.